

# Foes of ICC Look Toward Last-Minute Roadblock *W. Post* 12-28-05

## *Campaign Stresses Costs of Toll Road*

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Opponents are mounting a last-ditch effort to rally the public against the intercounty connector, the \$2.4 billion toll road that Maryland leaders hope to start building next year.

The campaign, coming days before the federal government is to issue its final environmental review, included a news conference yesterday by four Montgomery County elected officials who denounced what they called excessively high tolls.

Their analysis concluded that it would cost motorists about \$6 a day to use the highway, meaning commuters whose salaries are \$30,000 a year would spend 5 percent of their gross pay each week.

"The answer to who this highway will serve is quite evident," Del. Adrienne A. Mandel (D-Montgomery) said at the news conference in Rockville. "The trucking companies will not wink an eye at these tolls, while the public will wince."

This week, the Audubon Naturalist Society plans to debut a television commercial on cable stations in Montgomery. The ad states that the planned road is bad for the environment, won't relieve traffic and will cost users money.

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See CONNECTOR, B8, Col. 1

# ICC's Foes Hope to Rally Public Against Road

CONNECTOR, From B1

An announcer says "toll" three times in the 30-second spot, which ends with a voice declaring, "The ICC — a toll road that's good for nothing."

Maryland Transportation Secretary Robert L. Flanagan dismissed the flurry of opposition activity as "a desperate, eleventh-hour effort." He said drivers would pay no more in tolls than daily Metro riders spend on fares.

The 18-mile, six-lane highway would cut through a mix of parkland and residential communities between Interstates 270 and 95 in northern Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Federal approval — which state officials anticipate — would represent one of the last major hurdles for a project that has been 50 years in the works.

Mandel was joined at the news conference by Montgomery County Council members Phil Andrews (D-Gaithersburg-Rockville) and Marilyn Praisner (D-Eastern County), and Takoma Park City Council member Marc Elrich.

"The public needs to know the truth about the [project] before it's too late," Andrews said. "They need to know we are making a huge mistake."

The state plans to pay for the road largely by borrowing against future federal funds and using toll revenue to repay bonds. The rest would come from state funds and money earmarked by Congress.

Supporters say the highway is necessary to link the thriving business community along I-270 with Baltimore-Washington International Airport and the Port of Baltimore, both accessible by I-95. They also say it would reduce traffic in the rapidly crowding northern suburbs.

But state officials have acknowledged that building the highway would do little, if anything, to relieve traffic on the chronically clogged Capital Beltway.

Those opposed to the road also say it would damage the environment and catalyze development in a part of the state that is filling fast with strip malls, housing developments and other hallmarks of outer suburbia.

Opponents said their latest campaign is aimed at changing opinion in areas outside the highway's immediate corridor. "Our main target is people who don't know the way the project affects them," said Brian Henry of the Audubon Naturalist Society. "They've sort of been left



A TV commercial by opponents says the intercounty connector would boost development and do little to ease congestion on the Capital Beltway and other roads.



BY TIMOTHY JACOBSEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**"The public needs to know . . . we are making a huge mistake," Phil Andrews says of building the road.**



**Robert Flanagan calls the drive "a desperate, eleventh-hour effort."**

out of this because they think, 'It's not in my backyard, so therefore it doesn't affect me.'"

But, he said, "there's no question that the [connector] is draining money away from Metro

and other public transit. What's being missed about the most expensive transportation project in the state's history is it does impact them."

Henry said opponents will pass out leaflets and go door to door in Silver Spring, Bethesda and elsewhere to try to convince residents that the project would negatively affect them.

Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D), a proponent of the project, joined the office of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) in denouncing such efforts.

"Just like the Grinch who stole Christmas, there are some who would steal the most promising thing we have to reduce gridlock in our region: the intercounty connector," said Duncan, who is seeking to win the Democratic primary for governor next year.

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Flanagan, the state transportation secretary, said he expects federal approval of the environmental impact statement within a few weeks. After a 30-day public comment period, the federal government can issue its final approval of the project so the Army Corps of Engineers can begin issuing the needed permits.

"Once we get the federal permits, we are off and running," Flanagan said.

At that point, state lawmakers could still balk at the project's price, and opponents have promised to bring legal action if needed.

Henry said one of the goals of his group's campaign is to convince people that "this is a decision we can still make and that it's not something that's already been decided."



BY BILL GLEARY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**The connector would be built near the woods on the left side of Park Vista Drive in northern Montgomery County.**